

THE BARAKAT GALLERY

Masterpieces of Chinese Art
Volume I
3300BC - 220AD



The Han Dynasty

The overextension of the labor force during the Qin Dynasty would result in a popular uprising against the empire. In 206 B.C., Liu Bang, a Qin official, led an army composed of peasants and some lower nobility to victory and established his own Dynasty in place, the Han. However, unlike the Qin, the Han would unify China and rule virtually uncontested for over four hundred years. It is during this time that much of what is now considered to be Chinese culture was first actualized. The bureaucracy started under the Qin was now firmly established. The vast lands of China were now under the firm grip of a central authority. Confucianism became the state ideology although the worship of Taoist deity remained widespread, both among the peasants and the aristocracy. Ancient histories and texts were analyzed and rewritten to be more objective while new legendary myths and cultural epics were transcribed.

The Han era can also be characterized as one of the greatest artistic outpourings in Chinese history, easily on par with the glories of their Western contemporaries, Greece and Rome. Wealth pouring into China from trade along the Silk Road initiated a period of unprecedented luxury. Stunning bronze vessels were created, decorated with elegant inlaid gold and silver motifs. Jade carvings reached a new level of technical brilliance. But perhaps the artistic revival of the Han Dynasty is nowhere better represented than in their sculptures and vessels that were interred with deceased nobles. Called *mingqi*, literally meaning “spirit articles,” these works depicted a vast array of subject, from warriors and horses to ovens and livestock, which were buried alongside the dead for use in the next world, reflecting the Chinese belief that the afterlife was an extension of our earthy existence. Thus, quite logically, the things we require to sustain and nurture our bodies in this life would be just as necessary in our next life.

The Han Dynasty is divided into two distinct periods, the Western Han (206 B.C.-9 A.D.) and the Eastern Han (23- 220 A.D.) with a brief interlude. Towards the end of the Western period, a series of weak emperors ruled the throne, controlled from behind the scenes by Wang Mang and Huo Guang, both relatives of empresses. They both exerted enormous influence over the government and when the last emperor suddenly passed away, Mang became ruling advisor, seizing this opportunity to declare his own Dynasty, the Xin, or “New.” However, another popular uprising began joined by the members of the Liu clan, the family that ruled the Han Dynasty, the Xin came to a quick end and the Eastern Han was established in its place with its capital at Loyang (Chang’an, the capital of the Western Han, was completely destroyed).

However, even as Chinese influence spread across Southeastern Asia into new lands, the Eastern Han Dynasty was unable to recreate the glories of the Western Period. In fact, this period can be characterized by a bitter power struggle amongst a group of five consortial clans. These families sought to control the young, weak emperors with their court influence. Yet, as the emperors became distrustful of the rising power of the clans, they relied upon their eunuchs to defend them, often eliminating entire families at a time. During the Western Han, the Emperor was viewed as the centre of the universe. However, this philosophy slowly disintegrated under the weak, vulnerable rulers of the Eastern Han, leading many scholars and officials to abandon the court. Eventually, the power of the Han would completely erode, ending with its dissolution and the beginning of the period known as the “Three Kingdoms.”

Han Bronze Pou Wine Vessel
Featuring a Lid Attached by a Chain



FZ.348
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions: 14" (35.6cm) high

Catalogue: V22
Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: UAE

This bronze *pou* urn, also known as a *lei*, is one of the types of vessels used for holding wine or water. The vessel steadily expands from its tapered base until the upper mid section where the rings are placed and contracts at the neck area. The neck is short, slightly flaring upward near the mouth which is rimmed with a flatten border that runs flush to the lid. The lid is attached to one of the holding rings by a chain link with one-inch interlocking chains. Earthen residue adheres to the vessel, patch worked with areas of discoloration from oxidization and changes in patina color and texture that occurs over time. The elegant shape of the vessel attests to the aesthetic value placed on ritual vessels that were used in ceremonies and buried in tombs during the Han Dynasty. - (FZ.348)

Western Han Bronze Hu



H.520
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 17.5" (44.5cm) high
Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese
Style: Western Han Dynasty
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

Used for holding wine or water, this bronze Hu is an outstanding specimen of Western Han bronze ritual vessels. The bronze industry flourished during this period as the state pursued policies to expand and develop the manufacture of bronze pieces. This vessel reveals the aesthetic qualities and ancient prescriptions placed on reproducing canonical forms of "the golden age". This Hu is adorned with three horizontal bands and two circular handles attached to the body and decorated in Taotie motif. Its body is full, contracting sharply at the base and gently at the neck where the short neck and slightly flared mouth is formed.

The origins and significance of the Taotie, an important mythical animal motif that has evolved from ancient times, still evades scholars who believe that the enlarged eyes of the beast represent its protective and propitious power. The belief that drinking from the ancient bronze wine vessels would bring auspicious fortune pervaded, adding to the mystery and sense of empowerment attached with collecting bronzes throughout the ages. Bronze wares were included among the items that were interred with the dead to comfort them in their afterlife. During the Han Dynasty, bronze Hu became a favored item in this practice as well as in other ritual sacrifices. This bronze Hu carries the charm and mystery of the Han who prized bronze for its ritualistic properties and confirmation of social status. We may only wonder whose hands it has passed. - (H. 520)

Han Large Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse



H.631

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

50.5" (128.3cm) high x 42" (106.7cm) wide x 13" (33.0cm) depth

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

Expressively modeled in a firm pose, standing to attention with tail erect, this horse of the Han Dynasty depicts the power and grace of the new breed of horse from the west known as the "Heavenly Horse of China." This horse is tall and large, head bridled and torso saddled as if it were ready to engage in battle. Remarkably, the saddle still bears traces of the original red pigment that completed the decoration. It intimidates us with its open mouth, teeth showing, visible tongue, upright ears, and flared nostrils. This horse has a powerful rounded neck with hogged mane reaching up between the ears and head. Its torso, proportionately smaller than its chest and neck, is delicately sculptured, and its long legs appear to be mounted on block-like hooves. The exaggeration of the chest and neck area draw attention to the horse who is strenuously amassing energy to release a bellicose cry, while the shape of the hooves not only gives it a feeling of solidity, but indicates that it was created to maintain an upright position in the tomb of its master.

During the reign of Emperor Wu, in order to improve the breed of horses in central China and strengthen the cavalry, the so-called "heavenly horse" was imported from the western region (present-day Middle East). Most horse sculptures found in Han Dynasty tombs portray horses with great strength and vigour. The way the horse is depicted speaks of the great love the Chinese have for the mythology and form of the horse. - (H.631)

Han Large Terracotta Sculpture of a Sitting Dog



H.642

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions: 30.25" (76.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Location: United States

This terracotta dog is a splendid example of mingqi, literally translated as: “items for the next world.” During the Han Dynasty, the ancient Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, high- ranking members of the social hierarchy were buried in splendid tombs replete with replicas of their daily lives rendered in all media. It is not uncommon to find ornate dinner sets with elegantly painted utensils, wine vessels, and food storage containers. Sculpted replica of warriors and guardians provided protection as musicians and entertainers provided company. Likewise, herds of domesticated animals were interred alongside the deceased to serve as food sources in the afterlife.

Although it is possible that this dog was entombed for consumption in the next world, the studded collar and harness he wears suggests otherwise. More likely, this dog was a beloved companion who served his owner well both on earth and beyond. His ears stand upwards in attention, as if carefully guarding his master throughout eternity. The heavy folds of skin around the eyes, feet, and jowls and the curly tail, as well as the general size and stature, suggest that this dog may be an ancient Chinese Shar Pei, a breed noted for their wrinkled physique. Although similar works were meant to serve as food for the afterlife, the love and attention invested in the creation of this stunning work of art suggests that this dog is much more than food. Instead, this beloved pet sits faithfully by his master’s side throughout eternity. - (H.642)

Han Bronze Juizhou with Twelve Bronze Wine Cups



H.646
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions:
6.25" (15.9cm) high x 12.75" (32.4cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Style: Han Dynasty
Medium: Bronze
Location: United States

Juizhous, bronze wine tables of this type, are extremely rare. While similar works in green-glazed ceramic, imitating bronze originals, are more frequent, they are often discovered only with a few of the cups surviving. To have a complete set, intact, in bronze is exceptional. This masterpiece, however, is exceptional even amongst other similar bronze examples. The legs, shaped like horse hooves, which support the table, are unusual. The vibrant red pigment that adorns the inside of the cups is phenomenal. The rich patinas that graze this set are quite varied due to their location. Discovered buried inside a tomb, this wine tasting set clearly played as important a role in the afterlife as it did in this world.

This set reveals as much about the sophisticated social customs of the Han Dynasty as it does about their spiritual beliefs. Clearly, the joys of life, including the enjoyment of wine, continue on into the next world. This set was not interred with its owner as a memorial to his wealth, but as a functional tool meant for use in the afterlife. In fact, this table and these cups were forged by a master to survive throughout eternity, as they seemingly have. While we gaze upon this set and hold the cups in our hands, raising them up to our lips, we are transported back in time. We repeat the same actions that occurred almost two millennia ago. Yet, the action of drinking would have continued into the afterlife and beyond. Thus we can hold these cups and imagine saying a toast, to the original owner of this set, who continues to treasure this remarkable work of art from the next world as we do in our own. - (H.646)

Han Green-Glazed Terracotta Money Box



H.829

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions: 6.25" (15.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: United States

This Chinese money box dates from the Han Dynasty. Modern examples in wood testify that these ancient “piggy banks” have been part of Chinese culture for well over two thousand years. During the Han Dynasty, such chests would have likely been made out of wood, or in the rarest cases, for the wealthiest individuals, bronze. The gorgeous green glaze of this terracotta box recalls similar works in bronze, and the glaze has acquired a beautiful, soft iridescent patina over the ages. Commonly referred to as “silver frost,” this iridescence is the result of wet and dry periods in a tomb whereby the clay dissolves the lead glaze and redeposits it on the surface, where it hardens. A testament of age, this patina is also admired by collectors for its charming aesthetic qualities, similar in effect to mother of pearl.

Perhaps the most charming feature of this box is also the most practical, a little removable lid, complete with handle and hinges rendered in low relief, that allows access to its precious contents. The surface is dotted with tiny bosses that probably imitate a feature of the real life chest this terracotta version imitates. Although this vessel would have functioned as a money box in life, it was found discovered buried in a tomb. Such a work might have originally been buried containing coins and jewels inside, to be used by the deceased in the afterlife. A symbol for the bounties of life, for timeless wealth and eternal prosperity, this ancient treasure chest would have represented the riches to be experienced in the afterlife. Today, this box is not only a gorgeous work of art, treasured for its history and rarity; but also a stunning reminder of the richness and luxury of the Han Dynasty, both in this world and the next. - (H. 829)

Western Han Terracotta Sculpture of a Spotted Ox



H.662
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 15.25" (38.7cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

During the Han Dynasty, sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. This bovine sculpture is exceptional for two reasons. While similar examples exist, most were found harnessed to wagons and carts and were meant to function as beasts of burden. However, this sculpture was discovered buried as part of a herd, contained inside a pen with other domesticated animals, suggesting that this ox served as food. Besides its function, this sculpture is also remarkable for its massive size and exquisite state of preservation. The painted coat of white spots against a black background imitates the classic black and white pattern typical of bovines. Such delicate painted surfaces rarely survive the ravages of time and the stresses of excavation. - (H.662)

Western Han Terracotta Sculpture of an Ox with Tail and Horns



H.664
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 17.5" (44.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

The Han culture believed that the afterlife was a continuation of our earthly existence. Thus, logically, as humans require food to nourish our bodies on earth, so too will we require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. However, even in this incomplete state, the evocative nature of this sculpture is uncanny. The charming facial structure of this bovine is so naturalistic that one feels the presence of the animal possessing this sculpture. Created to serve as food for the afterlife, this work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of the Han Dynasty. This ox effigy has served its eternal purpose well. Today, it continues to nourish our souls with its beauty and grace. - (H.664)

Western Han Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse and Carriage



H.717
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 38.5" (97.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Location: United States

Expressively modeled in a firm pose standing at attention with tail erect, this horse of the Han Dynasty depicts the power and grace of the new breed of horse from the west known as the "Heavenly Horse of China." This horse is caparisoned with an arrangement of ornamental harnesses and decorative bridal. Its mouth is held slightly ajar, teeth showing, and with upright ears and flared nostrils combine to imbue this work with the spirit of the steed. While the size and beauty of this horse are enough alone to impress, even more stunning is the complete carriage that this horse hauls behind him, comprised of two delicately modeled wheels, an axel rod, the carriage, and the neck yoke and poles.

Considering that this sculpture was discovered buried in a tomb alongside the deceased, we can assume that the individual for who this work was created was likely carried by horse and carriage during his life as he would continue to be in the afterlife, thanks to this terracotta effigy. It is fascinating to think that this device, a horse drawn carriage, here over two-thousand years old, continued to be the major means of transportation up until the 20th century; in some parts of the world, they still are. During the reign of Emperor Wu, in order to improve the breed of horses in central China and strengthen the cavalry, the so-called "heavenly horse" was imported from the western region (present-day Middle East). Most horse sculptures found in Han Dynasty tombs portray horses with great strength and vigor. The way the horse is depicted speaks of the great love the Chinese have for the mythology and form of the horse. This horse is an expression of that affection. - (H.717)

Han Terracotta Mythological Beast



H.917

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions: 10" (25.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Location: United States

Striding forward on powerful haunches, this mythological beast is a composite of several different animals. He bears the hoofed legs and muscular body of a bull with a distinctively bovine head. Bosses rise from his body, following his spinal chord, and culminate in two pointed horns that protrude from the top of his neck. His arched tail, held up over his back, appears to be more canine than bovine or equestrian. Might this beast be a fanciful depiction of a dragon? Certainly the horns and head suggest so. Clearly, this is a fierce, untamed beast. With its head lowered, he appears to charge forward like a bull, thrusting his horns forward into whatever obstacle might block his path. His ribcage is visible along his torso, imbuing the work with energy and vitality. This magnificent sculpture is an insightful glimpse into the fantastic mythology of ancient China. - (H.917)

Han Frosted Green-Glazed Terracotta Dog



H.1037

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions: 12" (30.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: United States

This green-glazed terracotta dog is a splendid example of mingqi, literally translated as: “items for the next world.” During the Han Dynasty, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus high-ranking members of the social hierarchy were buried in splendid tombs replete with replicas of their daily lives rendered in all media. It is not uncommon to find ornate dinner sets with elegantly painted utensils, wine vessels, and food storage containers. Sculpted replica of warriors and guardians provided protection while musicians and entertainers provided company. Likewise, herds of domesticated animals were interred alongside the deceased to serve as food sources in the afterlife. Although it is possible that this dog was entombed for consumption in the next world, he wears a studded collar and harness that join together in a loop, ready to be hooked onto a leash. More likely, this dog was a beloved companion who served his owner well both on earth and beyond.

Standing at attention, the dog’s ears are curled over and his mouth is held wide open, as if barking, with his tongue sticking slightly out, a charming feature. The gorgeous green glaze has acquired a beautiful, soft iridescent patina over the ages. Commonly referred to as “silver frost,” this iridescence is the result of wet and dry periods in a tomb whereby the clay dissolves the lead glaze and redeposits it on the surface, where it hardens. A testament of age, this patina is also admired by collectors for its charming aesthetic qualities, similar in effect to mother of pearl. Although similar works were meant to serve as food for the afterlife, the love and attention dedicated to the creation of this stunning work of art suggests that this dog is much more than food. Instead, this beloved pet stands faithfully by his master’s side throughout eternity. If we listen carefully, we can almost hear him barking, alerting his lost master to our presence. - (H.1037)

Set of One Hundred Western Han Painted Terracotta Warriors



H.1072
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 20" (50.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

This remarkable set, composed of one hundred individually modeled and painted warriors, is a type of work known as mingqi, literally translated as, “items for the next world.” This army of sculpted warriors was discovered buried in the tomb of an elite member of the upper strata of Western Han society. Discovered outside of modern X’ian, the site of the ancient capital of China, Chang’an, this tomb find recalls the famous tomb of Emperor Shihuangdi. While much smaller in scale, both in regards to the number of figures and their size, this set still invokes the marvel and majesty of Ancient China. Each warrior is individually hand painted with a slightly different expression: some feature smooth faces, others have wispy moustaches. Each warrior wears a unique outfit. Some feature certain emblems that are thought to signify rank. Other warriors sport quivers on their back, suggesting that they were archers. Most of the figures have holes in their hands, implying that they once carried weapons, such as a spear or a bow, that have since disappeared. Most likely, these weapons were made out of wood and deteriorated over the centuries. Considering how damaging time and the natural elements can be to a work of art, the condition of this set is outstanding. Much of the original pigment remains intact. Beautiful red, blues, greens, and grays decorate their uniforms and provide insight into the fashions of Ancient China. This set was created specifically to be buried alongside the deceased to protect his soul throughout the afterlife. Today, this set of a hundred painted warriors is a monument to the cultural glories of Han Dynasty, one of the most impressive ages of artistic creation in the history of human civilization. - (H.1072)

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery

Pair of 'Sichuan' Sitting Dogs



DL.1000
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions: 32.28" (82.0cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

This fabulous pair of sitting dogs was excavated in Sichuan Province. Although it is possible they were meant to serve as a source of food, their elaborate collars and harnesses suggest otherwise. Most probably their function was to stand guard over the tomb of their master for eternity. Traces of light blue pigment can be found on both animals who seem to be taking their duties seriously. One can almost see their ever-alert ears twitching and hear their deep gnarl, as they attentively stand ready for their master's every command. These sculpted canines express most ardently an ancient peoples' extreme regard for, and intimate relationship with the natural world that surrounded them. Today, the spirit of these dogs endures ever so proudly, one need only to gaze at their faces to experience their age-old guardian powers. - (DL.1000)

A Han Dynasty Painted Pottery 'Fang-Hu'



DL.2082

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

16.7" (42.4cm) high x 7.4" (18.8cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

The term “Fang” is a prefix used to describe a squared-off or faceted variation of a normally rounded form, in this case the Hu wine storage vessel. The extensive polychrome painting that decorates the sides and the lid of this vessel, depicting scrolls and geometric motifs, is quite rare. Seldom do more than traces of pigments survive intact and in this example they retain much of their original brilliance. The patterns may have been inspired by contemporary embroidery and textile patterns, in tune with the fashion of the time. The beautiful Tao Tieh masks, depicting stylized dragons holding handles in their mouths, are noteworthy for their fine relief details and painted highlights. This wine vessel was found interred alongside an elite member of the Han social hierarchy. During the Han Dynasty, it was believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, logically, if we require food and drink to nourish our bodies on earth, we require the same to nourish our souls in the next world. The wine once contained within this Fang Hu has vanished, perhaps consumed during the celestial feasts of the afterlife. While this vessel represents the sophisticated artistic and culinary traditions of the Han, it also symbolizes their religious and philosophical beliefs. - (DL.2082)

A Pair of Han Dynasty White Painted Seated Horses and a 'Fang-Hu'



DL.2083
Origin: Shandong Province
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

This stunning set of two seated horses and a 'Fang-Hu' encapsulate many of the best qualities of Han Dynasty ceramics. The term "Fang" is a prefix used to describe a squared-off or faceted variation of a normally rounded form, in this case the Hu wine storage vessel. The extensive polychrome painting that decorates the sides and the lid of this vessel, depicting scrolls and geometric motifs, is quite rare. Seldom do more than traces of pigments survive in tact and in this example they retain much of their original brilliance. The patterns may have been inspired by contemporary embroidery and textile patterns, in tune with the fashion of the time. The beautiful Tao Tieh masks, depicting stylized dragons holding handles in their mouths, are noteworthy for their fine relief details and painted highlights. The fabulous pair of pottery seated horses also retain much of their original polychromy. The harnesses are carefully outlined in black and orange hues against their white bodies. The saddles are boldly depicted, but the most charming detail is the elaborate purple scrollwork that ripples over the figurines. The mouths of these magnificent creatures are slightly ajar and it is clear from their finery that they represent the prized possessions of a member of the elite of Han society.

- (DL.2083)

Large Han Dynasty Painted Pottery Bull



DL.2090

Origin: Shaanxi Province, Xi'an

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

15.7" (39.9cm) high x 27.5" (69.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

During the Han Dynasty, sculptural effigies of animals were often interred in the tombs of elite members of the social hierarchy. These sculptures were intended to accompany the spirit of the deceased. This sculpture of a bull is remarkable for its massive size. The Han culture believed that the afterlife was a continuation of our earthly existence. Thus, logically, as humans require food to nourish our bodies on earth, so too will we require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. Originally, this sculpture featured removable horns and a tail that, unfortunately, have been lost to us over time. However, even in this incomplete state, the evocative nature of this sculpture is uncanny. The charming facial structure of this bull is so naturalistic that one feels the presence of the animal possessing this sculpture. Created to serve as food for the afterlife, this work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of the Han Dynasty. - (DL.2090)

A Pair of Han Dynasty White Painted Pottery Seated Horses



DL.2081
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions:
9.94" (25.2cm) high x 13" (33.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

This fabulous pair of pottery seated horses retain much of their original polychromy. The harnesses are carefully outlined in black and orange hues against their white bodies. The saddles are boldly depicted, but the most charming detail is the elaborate purple scrollwork that ripples over the figurines. The mouths of these magnificent creatures are slightly ajar and it is clear from their finery that they represent the prized possessions of a member of the elite of Han society.

Valued for their speed, strength and beauty, horses were one of the most admired animals in China. The horse has enabled man to swiftly transport massive armies into distant and neighboring territories in order to secure vast wealth and land. According to Chinese tradition, there existed a horse so powerful and beautiful that it was believed to be bequeathed from heaven. In early China, owning a horse required wealth and status, eventually becoming a sign of one's social standing. Equestrian activities only encouraged the indulgence of the wealthy few who owned horses. Naturally in Chinese art, the horse became a favorite subject of artists who tried to create visual representations of the animal that captured both its vitality and presence. During the Han Dynasty, the horse was rendered in miniature sculptural form to be interred with the dead. It was believed that the animal could assume its earthly powers and assist the deceased in the dangerous journey to the other world. This custom answered to the needs of a particular belief system regarding life after death and the spiritual world. - (DL.2081)

Western Han Painted Terracotta Sculpture of a Horse



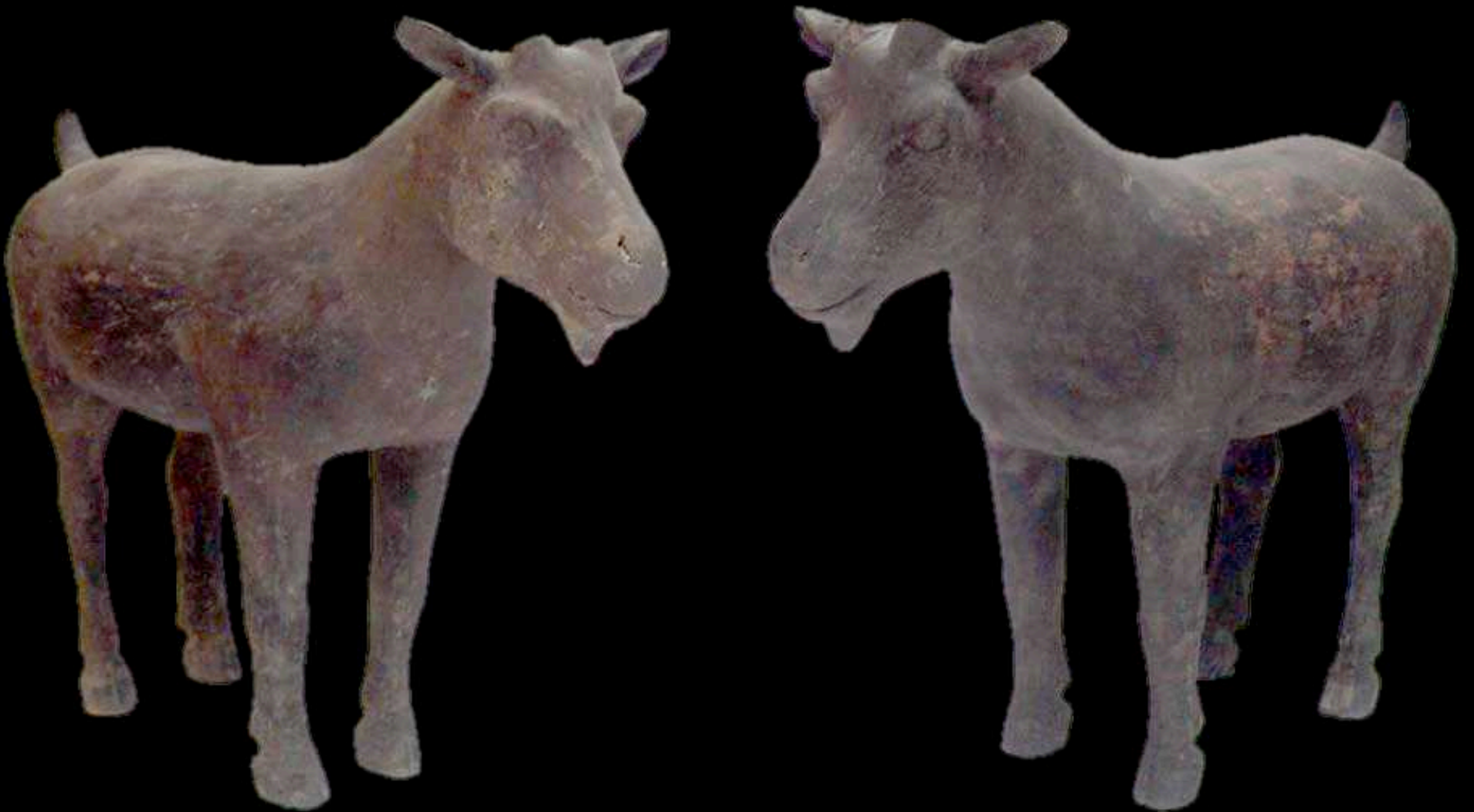
H.703
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 9 AD
Dimensions: 26.5" (67.3cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Painted Terracotta
Location: United States

The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to the horse. The rapid mobility of horse allowed for quick communication between far away provinces. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The importance of the horse in the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered. Horses were believed to be related to mythological dragons, reflecting their sacred status within society. During the unification of China under the Han Dynasty, bands of mounted nomadic warriors from the north threatened the country. In order to thwart their attacks, the Chinese sought to import stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the Mongol ponies used by the invaders), eventually leading to the creation of the Silk Road.

This highly unusual sculpture of a horse combines various features typical of regions from Shichuan to Gansu and Shangdong. Most unique is the brightly colored paint that decorates the head and body of the horse. Red, blue, white, and green lines and dots create lovely patterns that seem to represent the horse's saddle and harness. Furthermore, the horse's mouth, teeth, and ear are all highlighted in red, as are individual hairs of the stiff, arching mane. This sculpture also features an attached arching tail that fits into an iron mounting. The upright ears and tail give this creature an alert, attentive manner. This creature provided security and strength, allowing the empire to secure its borders and expand its influences across Central Asia. This remarkable sculpture is a creation of immense cultural and historical significance that attests to the critical role of the horse in ancient Chinese civilization. - (H.703)

Pair of Han Terracotta Goat Sculptures



X.0413

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

11.75" (29.8cm) high x 15.375" (39.1cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Location: Great Britain

During the Han Dynasty, sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Primarily fashioned from terracotta, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. Beasts of burden and animals reared for food were both interred to provide for the needs of the deceased. This incredibly naturalistic pair of goats would originally have been arranged in a pen or enclosure with other domesticated animals. The modelling is simple but exquisite with each goat featuring a small beard, upright tail and pointed ears. Between the ears are two small holes designed to support a pair of horns probably fashioned from a perishable material such as wood. The eye-sockets are raised and the nostrils are formed from two curved indentations. The surface has been painted with a brown pigment with slightly darker areas around the hooves. The head of the one of the pair is tilted slightly to the viewer's left. Today, we are drawn to these sculptures as beautiful works of art. However, they also reflect the religious and philosophical beliefs of the ancient Chinese and are therefore of tremendous cultural and historical significance. - (X.0413)

A Pair of Han Dynasty Painted Pottery Seated Horses with Detachable Riders



DL.2068
Origin: Shandong Province
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions:
9" (22.9cm) high x 10.6" (26.9cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

The impact of the horse on the history of China cannot be underestimated. In fact, the ancient unification and expansion of the Chinese Empire was due in large part to this majestic creature. Their rapid mobility enabled quick correspondence between far away provinces, allowing the establishment of a centralized power. Likewise, the military role of horses aided in the conquest and submission of distant lands. The influence of the horse on the history and culture of China can be viewed, in part, through the artistic legacy of this great civilization. Believed to be relatives of mythological dragons, a theory reflecting their sacred status, horses were glorified and revered in sculpture, painting, and literature. During the unification of China under the Han Dynasty, bands of mounted nomadic warriors from the north threatened the country. In order to thwart their attacks, the Chinese imported stronger, faster steeds from Central Asia (as opposed to the native Mongol ponies) eventually leading to the creation of the Silk Road. During the Han Dynasty, the horse was rendered in miniature sculptural form specifically in order to be interred with the dead. It was believed that the sculpted version could assume the powers of its living counterpart in the afterlife and assist the deceased in the dangerous journey to the next world. This custom catered to the needs of a particular belief system regarding life after death and the spiritual world.

This pair of polychromed horses are remarkable for the survival of their detachable riders. The horses themselves are adorned with white reins and an elegant purple ribbon-like motif. The figures retain much of their original colouring and their facial features are clearly distinguishable. Although the hands have been lost, the riders are in excellent overall condition. The care lavished on this charming pair reminds us of the respect that these animals commanded during the Han Dynasty. - (DL.2068)

A Pair of Green-Glazed Han Dynasty Figures



SK.004

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

36.5" (92.7cm) high x 12" (30.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Glazed Terracotta

Location: UAE

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery 'Sichuan' Chef



DL.1003

Origin: Sichuan Province China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

24.8" (63.0cm) high x 10.63" (27.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

A type of work known as mingqi, literally translated as, “items for the next world,” this sculpture was specifically commissioned by the family of the deceased to be buried alongside their departed relative, both as a symbol of their wealth and familial piety. However, only elite members of the social hierarchy could afford to be honored with such elaborate burials. During the Han era, the ancient Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, the tombs of nobles and high-ranking officials were filled with sculpted renditions of their earthly entourage. Musicians, chefs, attendants, and guardians were placed alongside pots, vessels, cooking utensils, and herds of livestock. All these mingqi were expected to perform their functions continually throughout the afterlife.

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery

'Sichuan' Lady Dancer



DL.1004
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions:
28.3" (71.9cm) high x 13.78" (35.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terracotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

The guards would watch over the soul of the deceased, while the chef prepared meals, utilizing the meats of the livestock, and the musicians performed songs to nourish the spirit throughout eternity.

The smile that graces the face of this wonderful dancer is typical of the happy entertainers from the Sichuan Province. She wears an elaborate robe and a fantastic headdress featuring three flowers. The elegant posture of her legs, placed either side of a stool or pot, reflects the movement and action of the dance. A reflection of the wealth and sophistication of ancient China, this sculpture intrigues us with its vast historical and cultural insights. Furthermore, this work is a gorgeous symbol of the philosophical and religious belief of the Han. The eternal warmth and joy embodied by this ancient dancer brings a smile to our own faces. - (DL.1004)

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery

'Sichuan' Flute Player



DL.1007

Origin: China

Circa: 202 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

22.44" (57.0cm) high x 10.63" (27.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

The smile that graces the face of this wonderful flute player is typical of the happy entertainers from the Sichuan Province. Dressed in a long robe and a short cap, he kneels with his hands lightly placed around the instrument. The artist, perhaps because he was portraying someone it was not appropriate to idealize or deify, captured the intimacy, vibrancy, and intensity of an actual man. Locked in this bit of clay, a smile, a laugh, and a will to entertain are still apparent to a modern audience centuries after its creation. - (DL.1007)

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery

'Sichuan' Seated Musician



DL.1005
Origin: China
Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD
Dimensions:
23.23" (59cm) high x 11.42" (29cm) wide

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Terra Cotta
Condition: Extra Fine
Location: UAE

The smile that graces the face of this wonderful musician is typical of the happy entertainers from the Sichuan Province. Dressed in a long robe and a short cap, he kneels with his hands lightly placed around the instrument. The artist, perhaps because he was portraying someone it was not appropriate to idealize or deify, captured the intimacy, vibrancy, and intensity of an actual man. Locked in this bit of clay, a smile, a laugh, and a will to entertain are still apparent to a modern audience centuries after its creation. - (DL.1005)

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery

'Sichuan' Lady Holding a Mirror



DL.1006

Origin: China

Circa: 202 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

23.62" (60.0cm) high x 12.2" (31.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Style: Han

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

The smile that graces the face of this delightful female attendant is typical of this genre of clay figurines produced in the Sichuan Province. The woman holds a mirror in her left hand, whilst her right hand rests upon her knee. She is seated on the ground with her legs tucked beneath her. Her hair has been arranged in an elaborate coiffure and is further adorned with three large medallions or stylized flowers. The artist, perhaps because he was portraying someone it was not appropriate to idealize or deify, captured the intimacy, vibrancy, and intensity of an actual woman. Locked in this bit of clay, a smile, a laugh, and a will to entertain are still apparent to a modern audience centuries after its creation. - (DL.1006)

Han Dynasty Painted Pottery Bull Cart



DL.2064

Origin: China

Circa: 206 BC to 220 AD

Dimensions:

9" (22.9cm) high x 17" (43.2cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Han

Medium: Terracotta

Condition: Extra Fine

Location: UAE

During the Han Dynasty sculptural effigies of domesticated animals were often interred in the tombs of nobility and elite members of the social hierarchy. Created in all media, these sculptures accompanied the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. Similar examples of oxen exist, discovered buried as part of a herd, contained inside a sculpted miniature pen with other domesticated animals, suggesting that they served as nourishment. However, this bull, pulling a cart behind him, clearly functioned as a beast of burden that was to perform onerous chores throughout eternity. Besides its function, this sculpture is also remarkable for its exquisite state of preservation. Remnants of the original paint that once decorated the work are visible on the sides of the cart and the animal's face. Such delicate pigments rarely survive the ravages of time and the stresses of excavation. The cart is a masterpiece unto itself, composed of three separate pieces: the cart structure and two wheels with spokes. During the Han Dynasty, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was a continuation of our earthly existence. Thus, this bull and cart was entombed in place of the real thing in order to provide for the transport needs of the deceased as he journeys through the afterlife. This work is more than a mere sculpture; it is a gorgeous memorial to the religious and philosophical beliefs of the Han Dynasty. - (DL.2064)

Painted Terracotta Model of a House



LA.516
Origin: China
Circa: 100AD to 300AD
Dimensions: 41" (104.1cm) high

Collection: Chinese Art
Style: Eastern Han
Location: Great Britain

The earliest depiction of houses, going back to the Neolithic period, were modelled in ceramic. Before the Han period, such models more often consisted of a single cylindrical chamber with a roof, but during the Han dynasty designs of much more complex architectural complexes appeared throughout the country. Especially from the 1st century AD, tomb mingqi production expanded to include new types of artefacts, ranging from everyday tools to figures of domestic animals and architectural models. Tombs in Henan, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces have yielded a large quantity of architectural models featuring multi-storey buildings with overhanging roofs, brackets, pillars, ornamental balustrades, latticework windows and hinged doors. The majority was lead-glazed in sparkling colours including green, yellow, brownish and black, but unglazed painted examples are also known, especially in Sichuan.

Such models and other miniature or non-functional objects are collectively known as 'mingqi' (spirit articles) and have been traditionally interpreted as surrogates for objects of value placed in the tomb. Yet recent archaeological evidence have highlighted that these objects might have instead constituted an integral part of the strategy to recreate the earthly dwelling of the deceased. The replication of the living world and its constituents within the tomb might have been induced by various ideological factors, including a new religious trend emphasising the separation of the dead from the living and other material manifestations of different philosophical ideas, but also possibly by the effort to reproduce a self-sustaining version of the world- a fictive and efficacious comprehensive replica, made up of both real sacrificed humans and animals (the 'presented') and elements such as the multi-storey house (the 're-presented').

Daily life has thus been vividly 'reproduced' by capturing in a still image the various figurines peaking out from the house balconies and doors: look at the matron hieratically standing at the entrance door, holding a fan and looking towards his labourers to her right, either washing, holding a winnowing fan or a sickle, or again, at the archer perilously leaning outward on the balustrade of the third floor, shooting to the sky. Traces of the original red paint are also visible under the roof and on the brackets, suggesting that the entire house must have once been colourfully decorated with draperies, providing a vivid picture of what a wealthy abode must have looked like during the Han period. Furthermore, this house is composed of three storeys, a combination rarely encountered on domestic architecture of the period (usually made of one or two storeys) and more often employed in the depiction of military outposts such as watchtowers. Its architectural details, including lattice windows and bracketed pillars are extremely well preserved, as well as the upturned tiles on the overhanging roof, thus providing an indelible picture of this long-gone archaeological past.

TL tested. - (LA.516)

Warring States Bronze Bian Hu



H.671

Origin: China

Circa: 400BC to 300BC

Dimensions:

13" (33.0cm) high x 12.8" (32.5cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: UAE

Whereas before, war was characterized as a civilized contest between aristocratic armies, during the Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.), war evolved into the chaotic conflict we know it as today. Kings and princes were replaced on the battlefield by infantries lead by military generals. Peasants were recruited to serve on the front lines. Warfare intensified, especially in terms of the duration of campaigns. New arms and armor were invented, including the halberd and crossbow. Chariots rode alongside archers outfitted in iron helmets and body armor. Defensive walls were erected in order to repel invaders. However, despite the turmoil of the times, the arts continued to thrive. Bronze casting was revolutionized by the introduction of the lost-wax technique, while the alterations of kiln structures enabled new firing techniques that resulted in fully developed glazes.

China was perhaps the most civilized culture of the ancient world. Their science, philosophy, art, and technology were all years ahead of most other cultures. One gains an idea of their sophistication and wealth when viewing this stunning bronze Bian Hu. Once, long ago, at ceremonial feasts held by the noble elite, this vessel would have been used to dispense fine wines. Both the beauty and luxury of this work implies that it would have been the possession of the King, or perhaps a close member of his royal entourage. Quite simply, few people but the king could afford such a treasure. By far, the most exquisite feature of this vessel is the stunning, intricate curvilinear designs incised throughout the body. Additionally, the sides contain two Tao Tieh masks depicting stylized dragon heads rendered in strong relief holding loose ring handles in their mouths.

A rare feature of this Bian Hu is the incised mouth, resembling a clove of garlic, and the lid which has been incised with decorative Tao Tieh masks. It is believed that this form was introduced in bronze during this chaotic period in Chinese history known as the Warring States that followed the demise of the Zhou Dynasty and precipitated the formation of the Han. Discovered inside an ancient tomb, this Bian Hu was treasured as much in life as in the afterworld. During this era, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, important people were often enshrined with their treasured possessions as well as works specifically commissioned to be interred. Over the centuries, this work has acquired a fantastic and varied patina that further enhances the beauty and texture of the work. - (H.671)

Warring States Gilt Bronze Juizhou



H.673
Origin: China
Circa: 500BC to 400BC
Dimensions: 7" (17.8cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Gilt Bronze
Location: United States

This luxurious wine table, called a Juizhou, reveals the unrivaled wealth and sophistication characteristic of the Warring States period in Chinese history. Surely the value of the gilt bronze alone suggests that this work was the treasured possession of a noble or elite member of the social hierarchy. However, when one considers the mastery of the artistry, including the incised decorations, this Juizhou becomes even more splendid. Originally, the gilt bronze pieces that survive would have been fitted onto a wooden table. The frame would fit around the edges of the table while the legs would have been inserted into carved slots. Although the wood has long since decomposed, an approximation of the original has been recreated in plastic to hold the pieces in their proper position. While the frame segments are smooth and unfinished, the legs, shaped like stylized horse legs, have been embellished with detailed incised depictions of dragons along the sides with abstract and curvilinear motifs adorning the top and “hooves.” Interestingly, the insides of the legs have not been gilt, nor the upper half of the insert tabs.

This gorgeous wine table was discovered buried inside the tomb of its owner. However, this Juizhou is more than a symbol of earthly wealth, for it was meant to be used in the next world. The early Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, when this work was first forged, it was expected to last for eternity, as it seemingly has. While this table hosted many sumptuous wine feasts on earth, it continued to be used in the heavenly celebrations and feasts of the afterlife. This extraordinary Juizhou represents the wealth and luxury of ancient China, simultaneously symbolizing their religious and philosophical beliefs. Today it is a masterpiece of art that astounds us with its beauty and history alike. Like a fine wine, the beauty of this table has been aged to perfection. - (H.673)

Ordos

The Ordos culture refers to groups of nomadic peoples that inhabited the southern Mongolian Plateau as early as the Shang Dynasty. Though they lived along the western and northern perimeters of the main Han Dynasty settlements, they retained a distinctive culture more aligned with the Scythian peoples of the Steppes than their Chinese neighbors. They are known primarily through their metalwork. Many of the belt plaques, horse gear, and weapons that have been found depict scenes of animals in combat. Such themes are linked to the ancient Near Eastern tradition. During the Han Dynasty, the Chinese formulated peace treaties with the Xiongnu peoples who were the dominant force of the Ordos region at this time. Xiongnu tombs have been excavated in Mongolia that contained Chinese luxury goods such as silk and bronze mirrors next to their own bronze works.

Ordos Bronze Plaque



LO.616

Origin: Northern China

Circa: 500 BC to 200 AD

Dimensions:

3.25" (8.3cm) high x 5.4" (13.7cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: Great Britain

This bronze belt plaque is a perfect example of the Ordus style. A scene depicting a pair of animals in combat decorates the front. A mythological beast that may well be a dragon attacks what appears to be a ram, biting it on the neck. It is likely that this work was originally gilt, though the surface now has a lovely patina that testifies to its age. - (LO.616)

A Pair of Ordos Bronze Belt Buckle Plaques



LO.1052

Origin: Northern China

Circa: 300 BC to 100 BC

Dimensions:

1.675" (4.3cm) high x 2.125" (5.4cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Style: Ordos

Medium: Gilt Bronze

Location: Great Britain

These plaques can be safely attributed to the Xiongnu people. Although the early history of the Xiongnu is still blurred, we know that by the 3rd century BC they already formed a vast steppe confederacy stretching throughout the Eastern Eurasian steppes. The artefacts most commonly associated with the Xiongnu are the belt buckles formed either by a pair of solid cast plaques or a pair of openwork plaques cast in mirror image, comparable to the ones here illustrated. In fact many single plaques, like this one, originally would have been produced in pairs.

Each plaque depicts in mirror image the profile of a standing ox. All four legs of the ox are shown, with its head in three-quarter view, and its tail curving between its hind legs. The modelled border of each plaque forms a herringbone pattern, embedded with malachite green corrosion on the front. Together the two plaques form one complete set. The wearer's left hand plaque has a ring that projects sideways on the right as part of the fastening system and two small vertical loops on the reverse side opposite the ring. The other plaque also has two small vertical loops. The way in which the loops are made, confirms that each plaque was cast by the lost wax process. These artefacts were often produced by Han craftsmen, as most have been indeed found in Western Han tombs, suggesting that they were made for Chinese patrons with exotic taste or for the Xiongnu as a gift or a trade item.

Plaques like these are found in both northern China and Inner Mongolia and other examples appear in many collections worldwide. Yet it is very uncommon to have the complete buckle, as sets were often divided up for profit, dealers not understanding that these plaques function together. A plaque depicting a bovine image in the same kind of frame was also excavated from a tomb in Chengdu, Sichuan province, with coins dating the tomb to the late 3rd-2nd century BC. One other example was found in Tongxin xian Daodunzi, Ningxia province.

Reference: E. Bunker, *Ancient Bronzes of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes*, A.M. Sackler Foundation, 1997: pl.218, p. 257. Tian and Guo eds. *E'erdusishi qingtongqi*, Beijing 1986. Hu Changyu, "Chengdu shuyang Xi Han mugumu" *Kaogu yu wenwu* 1983.2; pp.26-7. Duan Shu'an, *Beifang Minzu*, Beijing, 1995. - (LO.1052)

Bronze Buckle Plaque



LO.1223

Origin: Northern China

Circa: 3 rd Century BC to 1 st Century BC

Dimensions:

4.5" (11.4cm) high x 2.75" (7.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: bronze

Location: Great Britain

This plaque can be safely attributed to the Xiongnu people. Although the early history of the Xiongnu is still blurred, we know that by the 3rd century BC they already formed a vast steppe confederacy stretching throughout the Eastern Eurasian steppes. The artefacts most commonly associated with the Xiongnu are the belt buckles formed either by a pair of solid cast plaques or a pair of openwork plaques cast in mirror image, comparable to the one here illustrated. In fact many single plaques, like this one, originally would have been produced in pairs; in each pair the plaque worn on the left side would carry a small hook for fastening on the front border of the right plaque, while the attachment of the belt was accomplished through the perforations in the openwork design.

Our openwork plaque, shaped like a horizontal B, without the defining border, features a mythological raptor (sometimes identified as a gryphon) in combat with a tiger. The raptor is a fantastic creature distinguished from the eagle by its almond-shaped animal eye. Both creatures are shown in profile but their appendages; both of the raptor's wings are shown as are all the four paws of the tigers. The wings and tail of the bird shows cell-like depressions reflecting the inlay technique common in contemporary golden plaques. The back of the plaque is slightly concave with no attachment loops.

A mirror-image version of this plaque was excavated at Xifeng xian Xichagou in Liaoning province with wuzhu coins dating to the reigns of emperors Wen (175 BC), Jin, Wu (140-87 BC) and Zhao. Another version of the same was also found at Urbium in southern Siberia, while a similar composition was found in a Qin-period tomb at Zaomiao, Tongchuan, Shaanxi province. The plaque is also closely related to several gold buckles in the Treasure of Peter the Great in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg.

Reference: E. Bunker, *Ancient Bronzes of the Eastern Eurasian Steppes*, A.M. Sackler Foundation, 1997: pl. 222, p. 260. Sun Shoudao, "Xiongnu Xichaogou wenhua gumuqun de faxian", *Wenwu* 1960.8-9: pp.25-35, figs. 2-19 and pls. 1-21. Devlet, Marianna. *Sibirskie poyasnye azhurnye plastinki, II v. do N.E- IV N.E.*, Akademia Nauka: Moscow, 1980. Kaogu yu Wenwu 1986.2: p.10. Gryaznov, M.P., *The Ancient Civilizations of Southern Siberia*, New York, 1969. - (LO.1223)

The Zhou Dynasty

In 1122 B.C., at the battle of Muye, the rebellious Zhou tribe defeated the imperial troops of the Shang Dynasty, China's first Imperial Dynasty. The Zhou Dynasty is itself composed of two periods that historians have dubbed Western (1122-771 B.C.) and Eastern (770-221 B.C.). During the Western period, the Zhou ruled from their capital Zongzhou (near modern X'ian). While the Zhou were highly influence by the Shang, over time, they developed their own unique style of decorating bronze and terracotta vessels. Perhaps their most important artistic innovation was the creation of primitive glazes. However, ambitious campaigns to expand their territory westward failed, and in 771, nomadic invaders ransacked Zongzhou, forcing the Zhou to flee eastwards to the city of Chengzhou, which became their second capital.

Western Zhou Bronze Yi Water Vessel



H.653

Origin: China

Circa: 1046 BC to 771 BC

Dimensions: 6.5" (16.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: United States

China was perhaps the most civilized culture of the ancient world. Their science, philosophy, art, and technology were all years ahead of most other cultures. One gains an idea of their sophistication and wealth when viewing this stunning bronze Yi. Once, long ago, before sitting down to a ceremonial feast, nobility would have washed their hands with this vessel, thus beginning the structured ritual of dining. Both the beauty and luxury of this work implies that it would have been the possession of the King, or perhaps a close member of his royal entourage. Quite simply, few people but the king could afford such a treasure. By far, the most unique, and charming, feature of this vessel is the legs and feet. The legs are shaped as stylized dragons with incised details while the feet depict four naturally rendered squatting bovine figures. The dragon motif reoccurs on the openwork “handles” attached to the two sides while a frieze of swirling patterns typical of the Zhou style covers the body. The proper handle at the back of the vessel is surmounted by a stylized horned dragon head.

Discovered inside an ancient tomb, this Yi was treasured as much in life as in the afterworld. During this era, the Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, important people were often enshrined with their treasured possessions as well as works specifically commissioned to be interred. Although most Yi vessels of the rounded bottom type were created during the Eastern Zhou period, scholars believe that this form was introduced during the closure of the previous Western Zhou Dynasty, from when this vessel dates. Over the centuries, this work has acquired a fantastic and varied patina that only enhances the beauty and texture of the work. - (H.653)

Garlic-Headed Vessel



SF.070

Origin: China

Circa: 500 BC to 200 BC

Dimensions: 4" (10.2cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Gilt Bronze

Location: Great Britain

The Shang Dynasty

Bronze working is believed to have developed in China without the influence of outside cultures around 2000 B.C. Although there was initially numerous centers of bronze technology, the area in contemporary Henan Province along the banks of the Yellow River eventually advanced to become the most important and influential cultural center of early Bronze Age China. An alloy of copper and tin, bronze was used to create weapons, horse bits and chariot parts, and ritual vessels. China was the only Bronze Age culture in the world to utilize the piece-mold casting method. The advantage of this technique, which involved the use of terracotta molds that were broken into smaller pieces before firing and then reassembled before casting, was that it allowed sculptors to achieve more intricate designs that were more sharply defined.

The Shang Dynasty is the first recorded kingdom in Chinese history. While no major texts have survived, examples of their pictogram writing have found found engraved on bronze vessels and oracle bones. According to legend, the dynasty was founded by a rebel hero who overthrew that last ruler of the corrupt Xia Dynasty. The Shang kings ruled over much of northern China and were engaged in frequent battles with nomadic tribesmen that roamed the steppes and other neighboring tribes. Their society was based primarily upon agriculture, supplemented by hunting and animal husbandry. The Dynasty switched capitals a number of times, although the city Jin, near modern-day Anyang, became the largest and most important.

Shang Dynasty Bronze Yan Steamer with Inscription



H.1093
Origin: China
Circa: 1250 BC to 1100 BC
Dimensions: 16.75" (42.5cm) high

Collection: Chinese
Medium: Bronze
Location: Great Britain

This glorious utensil surely would have been a treasured possession. However, this yan was not interred with its owner as a sign of wealth. Instead, this steamer was expected to continue cooking meals in the afterlife. The Ancient Chinese believed that the afterlife was an extension of our earthly existence. Thus, it seems logical to reason that as we require food to nourish our bodies on earth, we will require food to nourish our souls in the afterlife. This Yan was created to steam eternally, ushering the deceased into the next world. The bountiful feast that this yan symbolizes continues throughout eternity. Today, we marvel at this work both for its historical and cultural significance as well for its overwhelming beauty. - (H.1093)

Shang Dynasty Bronze Jue



AM.145 (LSO)

Origin: China

Circa: 1250 BC to 1100 BC

Dimensions:

7.5" (19.1cm) high x 6.7" (17.0cm) wide

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Bronze

Location: UAE

This elegant bronze vessel was made during arguably one of the most important dynasties in Chinese history. The Shang (or Yin) was based in northern China, lasted for over 500 years, and ended in 1046 BC. The first non-mythical dynasty, it was preceded by the semi-legendary Xia dynasty (2100-1600 BC), and followed by the Zhou dynasty. It is highly important to historians of ancient China for the large amount of historical information recorded on “oracle bones”, although more recent dynasties also recorded a great deal about it. It was in this period that real cultural coalescence was reached, with considerable achievements in politics, economy, culture, religion, geography, astronomy, calendar, art and medicine.

The comparatively small amount of information available in written documents – especially compared with that of later dynasties – makes social interpretations difficult; even the existence of the dynasty itself was in question until written records proving it were uncovered at Anyang. What is apparent is that the Bronze-Age politics of the time were highly warlike, with considerable defence architecture as well as monumental architecture and social complexity/stratification indicated through varying grave wealth.

One of the most important industries of the time was that of bronze casting, as Chinese craftsmen were unchallenged world leaders in the manipulation of this valuable metal. At this time, only the most socially elevated and wealthy of citizens – usually the royal court – could afford such luxuries, although its use spread until the army too was plentifully equipped with bronze weaponry and accessories such as chariot-fittings. While Xia bronzes do exist, the quality, complexity and decoration did not compare to the bronzes of the Shang dynasty, which were cast in a dazzling array of forms and stages of decoration.

The Jue is one of numerous metal vessel forms that were produced; it was designed to be used for wine, although for a more ritual than secular function. The jue is noted for its delicacy and elegance, and ancient examples were already highly prized by collectors during the Song dynasty (10th to 13th centuries AD). There are of course numerous versions of the jue, but this one is unusually complex in terms of construction, and frivolous decoration has been kept to a minimum in order to accentuate the form of the piece.

The jue stands on tripod legs formed like broad blades, stemming from the lower one third of an approximately egg-shaped vessel. There is a single handle that leads into the leg with the greatest angular disparity from the pouring spouts (see below). The form of the body narrows superiorly, giving rise to an elaborate double spouted apex that broadens to a flat dished spatulate surface on one side, and a deeper, semi-concentric pouring spout on the other. The neck where the latter spout joins the body of the vessel is surmounted by an ornate double-coned decoration. Other than a triple band of detail at the vessel's narrowest point, the surface of the bronze is unadorned except for the stunning multitone patina that testifies to the piece's great age.

The ancient Chinese who made and saw this piece would have viewed it as magical. While we may not have this regard, it can certainly be described as a beautifully conceived and executed piece of ancient art. - (AM.145 (LSO))

Neolithic

Many thousands of years ago, our earliest ancestors were nomadic tribes that survived by foraging the wild for food and shelter. During the Neolithic era, human groups first began to settle down permanently, establishing villages and communities. However, without new technological innovations, this sedentary culture would not have been possible. Foremost among these discoveries were agriculture and tool-making, both of which enabled humans to transform their natural environment into a sustainable society. Many thousands of years ago, the area presently covered by modern China was made up of distinct regions each with their own unique cultural identity. Archaeologists have been able to discern some of these cultures from each other based upon the burial styles, architecture, and pottery, perhaps the most immediate remnant of this age.

Neolithic Marble Figure



H.511

Origin: China

Circa: 3300 BC to 2050 BC

Dimensions:

13.25" (33.7cm) high x 6.75" (17.1cm) wide

Catalogue: V17

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Marble

Location: Great Britain

This marble carving of a human figure is one of the earliest examples of human images uncovered in China to date. Its origins are still shrouded in mystery, but it is likely that it represents an image of a female as the ancients believed the ritual practice of deference to fertility deities would ensure prosperity. Images of goddess figures suggest acknowledgment of the important role women played in the development of agriculture and animal domestication. This pillar shaped statue has a flat bottom and smooth surface with patches of earth attached in areas. Incised lines depict a person with arms extended over the chest, perhaps kneeling in a posture of reverence. The head is disproportionately large; lines above its squinted eyes represent hair. The bridge of the nose is long, characteristic of Northern cultures, and two bulges protrude from the sides of the face. A fine example of early man's belief in the power of reproduction reified in the body of women, this piece reminds us of our common belief in the origins of man. - (H.511)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel



H.778

Origin: China

Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC

Dimensions: 12.75" (32.4cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

When Neolithic mankind began to settle in areas further removed from sources of water, transportation of this vital fluid became a foremost necessity. After unsuccessful attempts to create water resistant vessel from wicker baskets caked in mud, pottery was invented. The creation of pottery in China dates back as early as 6000 B.C. when villagers first realized that the earth around fires became hard and impervious to liquid. From this realization came the birth of pottery, fulfilling the practical necessity of water transportation and allowing civilization to expand. While pottery was created to answer a need, it soon progressed to be more than functional: it was also beautiful. While Neolithic vessels would have been used to carry water or to store grains, they are also spectacular artistic creations. The forms of the vessels, built up from coiled clay, are elegant and refined.

The generic name for the Neolithic culture that created these vessels is Yangshao (3000-1500 B.C.). They are thought to have been the first to harvest silk from the silkworm, initiating a tradition the Chinese are still famous for today. While few specifics are known about the Yangshao culture, information gathered from archaeological excavations of tombs and tribal villages has provided a rudimentary vision of life in prehistoric China. Furthermore, the geometric paintings that decorate Neolithic vessels represent some of the earliest evidence of the origins and evolution of calligraphic writing in China. While these designs are purely abstract and in no way constitute a written language, the patterns, motifs, and application of paint all serve to give us insight into the intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere that would eventually foster the creation of Chinese symbols.

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. The main motif of this vessel is a red circle filled with an “x” repeated across the upper shoulder. Black and red semicircles radiate outwards concentrically, intermittently interrupted by a vertical red line and a tower of red “x”s. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.778)

Neolithic Yangshao Painted Terracotta Vessel



H.805

Origin: China

Circa: 3000 BC to 1500 BC

Dimensions: 13.75" (34.9cm) high

Collection: Chinese

Medium: Painted Terracotta

Location: United States

The generic name for the Neolithic culture that created these vessels is Yangshao (3000-1500 B.C.). They are thought to have been the first to harvest silk from the silkworm, initiating a tradition the Chinese are still famous for today. While few specifics are known about the Yangshao culture, information gathered from archaeological excavations of tombs and tribal villages has provided a rudimentary vision of life in prehistoric China. Furthermore, the geometric paintings that decorate Neolithic vessels represent some of the earliest evidence of the origins and evolution of calligraphic writing in China. While these designs are purely abstract and in no way constitute a written language, the patterns, motifs, and application of paint all serve to give us insight into the intellectual and aesthetic atmosphere that would eventually foster the creation of Chinese symbols.

As is typical of similar works, the upper half of this vessel is painted with abstract designs while the lower portion is left unfinished. While the decoration of this vessel is fairly simple compared to the complex spiral motifs of many others, the rhythmic interplay of the concentric arches creates a beauty that is quite pleasing to the eye. Four bands are filled by these arches, while the neck is adorned by two bands of black crenulated motifs. Although this vessel was originally created to serve a practical purpose, today it is appreciated as a gorgeous work of art, treasured both for its beauty and history alike. - (H.805)

Fossilised Horse Head



TF.012

Origin: China

Dimensions:

13.50" (34.3cm) x 18.25" (46.4cm) wide

Collection: Chinese Art

Medium: Bone

Condition: Very Fine

Additional Information:

over 30 million years old

Location: Great Britain

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